

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Sulpicio VENYAN, retired plantation worker
LAURANO JUABOT, retired plantation worker

Sulpicio Venyan, Visayan, was born in June, 1901 in Boljoon, Cebu, one of five children of Juan and Kulasa Neri Venyan.

He immigrated to Hawaii in 1922 and worked for Makaweli Plantation until the 1924 strike. He struck, was arrested, found not guilty and found a job at Gay and Robinson Plantation where he worked until retirement.

Venyan, a Catholic, was a member of the LuViMi, a mutual aid organization which provided funds to pay funeral expenses for its deceased members. The name stands for Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, three main areas of the Philippines. He is single and lives in Makaweli (Pakala), with his companion, Laurano Juabot.

Laurano Juabot, Visayan, was born on July 4, 1901 in Loay, Bohol, one of six children of Candido and Macaria Romero Juabot.

He engaged in small-scale trading until he immigrated to Hawaii in 1922. He worked on a sugar plantation in the Hilo area and participated in the 1924 strike.

After the strike, he moved to Kona and picked coffee for five years, then went to O'laa Plantation in 1930, staying there until 1935 when he moved to Honolulu and worked in building construction. In 1936 he moved to Kauai and worked on Gay and Robinson Plantation until he retired.

A Catholic, Juabot is single, and lives in Makaweli (Pakala),

Tape No. 5-39-1-78 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sulpicio Venyan (SV) and Laurano Juabot (LJ)

December 6, 1978

Makaweli, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Chad Taniguchi (CT)

EG: This is the first of the interviews with Sulpicio Venyan.

I'd like to ask you first of all, why did you come here to Hawaii in the first place?

SV: Because I was looking for money.

EG: How did you know that there was work to be had here in Hawaii?

SV: There were agents who were going around looking for people to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii.

EG: And what did they say?

SV: They said, "If you want to get some money, then go to Hawaii."

EG: And how many were you in your own family?

SV: We were seven.

EG: Did you have a piece of land for yourself, you and your family?

SV: Yes, we did. And my work used to be to plow that land. I did it by using a water buffalo. That was my work before.

And when I heard that there was work to be had here in Hawaii, I came here. When I heard that, then I got on the ship and went from Cebu to Manila. The boat stopped in Hong Kong for a short time, and then went to Japan, and then came here to Hawaii. About three days there in Hong Kong.

EG: What was the name of the ship you came on?

SV: Taiyo-maru.

EG: Were you many?

SV: Yes, we were many. Maybe we were around 200, or over.

EG: Were you all Visayans?

SV: Almost. But there were two Ilocanos that I remember. I could tell by the way they were talking that they were Ilocanos. I also didn't understand what they were talking about.

EG: How about the food on the ship? Was it okay?

SV: Yeah. For me, it was okay. There was one child who died on the trip over.

When we arrived in Honolulu, we were placed under quarantine because apparently we brought some kind of sickness with us. We were placed there in quarantine because we seemed to have brought along the sickness of mumps.

EG: And how long were you in quarantine?

SV: Maybe it was around two weeks. After that, the plantations picked us up to work in different places. And I was chosen to go to Kauai.

EG: How about on board ship; did you have any relatives who came over with you?

SV: No, there were no relatives who came with me, but there were some friends of mine who also came. These were people that I still knew in the Philippines who came along with me.

EG: Were they also assigned to Kauai with you?

SV: Yes, they were. But right now they're all dead. We were six.

EG: Were you all unmarried?

SV: Yes. None of my companions got married.

EG: Were there other passengers, though, who were married?

SV: Yeah, there were many.

When we came here to Kauai we were assigned to Makaweli Plantation. When I arrived at the plantation in Makaweli, my first work was kalai. Cut grass in the sugar fields. I was given a house to live in that was free. But for the food, you had to pay.

EG: And how much was your salary?

SV: It was \$1 a day.

EG: And who were your companions, then, when you were working?

- SV: They were all kinds of people. Not only Visayan. Ilocanos, Japanese, Hawaiian.
- EG: So you arrived in 1922, and the strike hadn't taken place yet?
- SV: That's right. It was there at Makaweli that I went out on strike, in 1924. It was Manlapit who came there to Makaweli and gave a talk about the strike.
- EG: You, yourself, did you hear him or...
- SV: No. I saw him but there were so many people that I actually didn't get to hear him myself.
- EG: But you also attended the meeting?
- SV: Yes, I did.
- EG: Were most of the people who attended Visayan?
- SV: Yes, they were.
- EG: What did you feel when you heard about Manlapit and about them going out on strike?
- SV: Well, we also agreed to go on strike because we were interested in increasing our salary from \$1 to \$2 a day.
- EG: Did you personally agree with the strike?
- SV: I went out on strike.
- EG: So what happened then?
- SV: Well, I moved to the strike camp there in Hanapepe.
- EG: Where were you living at the time of the strike?
- SV: I was living there inside of the Japanese School in Hanapepe. And even when we went out to walk around the town or something like that, people knew that we were strikers.
- EG: Where were you in the Japanese School?
- SV: I was upstairs.
- EG: Do you know, were there any other demands being made by the strikers, outside of the salary being raised from \$1 to \$2 a day?
- SV: Maybe. Maybe there were some others. But as far as I know, the demand was that the salary be raised.
- EG: What was your life like, inside of the strike camp?

SV: Oh, we were able to eat regularly. The food was brought in because there were people who supported us and donated food.

EG: Who gave the donations?

SV: A lot of people did. There were Japanese and Hawaiians, and Filipinos. I don't know about the haoles, though.

(Laughter)

EG: And what did you have besides the rice?

SV: Very often we had fish, because we were near the sea. And there were even some of the strikers who went out fishing.

EG: And how long, then, did you live there at the strike camp?

SV: Maybe it was only around two months.

EG: What really happened there in Hanapepe, the time of the incident?

SV: They really had a war. But for me, I was hiding. I was hiding out in the banana patch.

EG: Starting right from the very beginning, what happened?

SV: It all started with two Ilocanos who didn't go out on strike. They were going down the highway, and there was a guard standing out by the strike camp. And he asked them for some tobacco. And they had some tobacco because they were coming from the store, going by there. The Ilocanos stopped their bicycles and they were going to give some tobacco to the guard who was a Visayan. And when they put out their hand with the tobacco in it, it wasn't the tobacco that the Visayan guard grabbed but their arm. He dragged them inside of the strike camp, and others joined them, and then they pushed around or beat up the Ilocanos.

EG: Why did they beat them up?

SV: Because they just wouldn't join in the strike. When they started being beat up they began saying, "We'll go out on strike, Manong." So they stopped pushing them around. But they imprisoned the two of them right there in the strike camp. They kept them downstairs of the school. And they were also watched by the guards.

Then the plantation police came, and they wanted to rescue the two Ilocanos. But they wouldn't give them over to the plantation police. The plantation police said, "If you don't turn them over, you can be sure that we will make trouble for you."

The strikers responded by saying, "Go ahead."

The sheriff, Crowell, came with them and he was going to rescue the

two and grabbed a hold of them and began to run. And when they were chased by the strikers, that's when the shooting started. And they started just killing the Filipinos.

I myself, I went to hide in the banana patch because what's the use of dying for something like that?

EG: How long were you there in the banana patch?

SV: Until the war actually finished. When the whole thing was all over, then Sheriff Rice came and he just rounded up everybody. Including ourselves. We were all taken to the jail, including myself. We were very many there in the jail. Maybe more than 100. And we were questioned. After one week one half of the strikers were sent back to the Philippines. The rest stayed in jail. I was there for one month; inside the jail. Then we were all questioned. Every day, one would be questioned.

EG: What happened when they investigated you?

SV: I was able to go out.

EG: What was your life like inside of the jail?

SV: Well, we were just given food to eat and taken care of.

EG: And what did you do during the whole day?

SV: We were taken out to clean alongside the roads.

EG: Everyday?

SV: Yeah, everyday except Sunday. Every morning until around 3 o'clock in the afternoon we were working alongside the roads.

EG: What did you think about the strike, once you were inside of the jail there?

SV: Well, there's nothing we could do about it. We joined in order to raise our salaries, to be able to get \$2 instead of \$1 a day. And this violence happened at Hanapepe and we went to jail, and we were also responsible. So there we were in jail.

EG: So when you were released you just went out looking for work?

SV: Yeah, I went out looking for work and I came to this place here.

EG: Did they know that you had been a striker when you came to look for work here?

SV: They knew that I was a striker before, but they accepted me anyway. This is a private plantation, not like the others. It's the Robinson Plantation. They must have known it but nobody asked me

about it, the fact that I was a striker. And I wasn't included in the fighting anyway.

EG: There's a lot of stories about what really happened there at Hanapepe. Do you think that the sheriff and the police were really intent on killing the Filipinos to break the strike?

SV: Yeah, that's what really happened. When they arrived at the school, there were a lot of women and children who were around. They [the police] were afraid to start anything. And so, when they got out on the road [although he himself did not see it] there were people who were up on the high rise, who were waiting for them and began to pick them off. What they call "sharpshooters."

EG: Did you go through the banana patch in order to go to the road? Were you on your way to the road?

SV: No, I was hiding out there in the banana patch. I wasn't heading for the road at all.

EG: Do you know how many you were there, hiding out in the banana patch?

SV: I really don't know. But anyway, we were many.

EG: What were you feeling, when you were there inside of the banana patch.

SV: Naturally, what I was feeling was fear. I was afraid of being killed. I was afraid I might get hit by some of the bullets that were flying around. I myself, I didn't see the Sheriff Crowell come and get the Ilocanos. But when the police came in and they got the Ilocanos and started going out with them, and the people began chasing them, there was somebody who said, "Let's get out of here." And we ran for the banana patch. I knew that it was better if we hide.

EG: Manong, I myself, I'm a little bit confused because I've heard that there were a lot of arms that were hidden inside of the strike camp. Is that true?

SV: I don't know if that's true or not. But I myself, all I could see were stones or pieces of wood or small knives that people had. But I never saw any guns.

EG: Were there not police who were shot?

SV: No. As far as I know, the police were stabbed. The guy Evaristo was there also. He's a person who had ability to not be harmed by bullets. They would bounce off him. And if he had a gun, you can be sure he would have killed all of the police.

EG: Who were the leaders there inside of the strike camp?

SV: Evaristo was one of them.

EG: Yeah, but was there anybody else?

[I was asking the woman, Mrs. Allianic, SV's cousin, if she was in the strike camp, because she's talking and not allowing SV to answer for himself. And she said she used to go to school right by the strike camp. She was in school in Waimea.]

What was your daily life there inside of the strike camp?

SV: We were eating rice and just walking around and talking among ourselves.

EG: Where did the food come from?

SV: People went around to collect. And supporters gave us what they could.

EG: And who was doing the cooking?

SV: Sometimes I did, and sometimes some of my companions did. But each group did their own.

EG: Manong, there's some stories that we've heard, that the collectors who went around collected rice and fish and whatever they could, but they were also given money. And that sometimes, they put the money in their pocket. Did you ever hear anything like that?

SV: I don't know. I never heard anything like that. But they did collect rice and fish and whatever we needed.

EG: And you got these things everyday?

SV: No, we didn't get it everyday because sometimes there wasn't enough.

EG: Who was in charge of the collection?

SV: Those people who had cars.

EG: Yeah, but now, can you explain it a little better for me. If there are 200 strikers how was it distributed?

SV: When they arrived they divided it up equally among the people. Every person was given one glassful of rice. Whenever the food came in, they divided it up. It was the same with the fish. There used to be a lot more fish in Kauai before. And when they came in with it then they just divided it up among the people.

EG: As you look back on the strike what do you think about it now?

SV: It was bad. It was in bad taste. There were too many who died.

EG: Were there any close friends of yours or relatives who died?

SV: Not exactly, but there were a few that I knew who died. If they hadn't run away, they would have all been killed. There were some who were there at the sea catching fish, and so they weren't present either. It would have been a good strike if we didn't make a mistake. But we did with the violence, and so that's what ruined the whole thing. It was bad.

EG: Who made the mistake do you think?

SV: Us strikers. We're really the one who made the mistake, with the violence. In my opinion, it was the strikers who really made the mistake. If they hadn't [done something]....

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SV:stupid or something foolish with those two Ilocanos, this whole thing wouldn't have happened. The mistake really, there, was that Filipinos were not capable of uniting themselves together.

EG: [Now I'm asking him if he was included in any other strike. He said he's on the Robinson Plantation (the only non-unionized plantation in Hawaii), and he doesn't know anything about strikes. And he doesn't know what a union is.]

Are you now retired?

SV: Yes.

EG: And living here now?

SV: Yes, I am.

EG: Why were you included in the strike?

SV: Because I wanted to raise my salary. If we had won the strike, we would have been given a better salary. But we lost.

EG: Did you ever hear anything about people saying if you didn't join the strike that they would kill you?

SV: I never heard anything like that myself. Maybe they did that with some other people, but I myself, I never heard about that.

EG: How many were you on your plantation, that were included in the strike?

SV: Oh, plenty. Probably more than a hundred.

EG: On the day of the strike what did you do? Were you given a ride or something?

SV: No, we just walked. In my own case, the car that was owned by the police on the plantation carried my stuff to the strike camp.

EG: Did the police go out on strike also?

SV: No. They were just personal friends of mine, and so they carried my stuff and me to the strike camp. I was living at Camp 6 at that time, in Makaweli.

EG: Were there others who got a ride in this car, by the plantation police?

SV: I don't know. That particular trip, I was the only one given a ride. The purpose of the plantation police, in that particular instance, was just to help me. Because there were no other cars around at that time.

EG: Were they Filipinos?

SV: No, they were Hawaiians.

EG: Can you think of any other leaders that were there in the strike camp?

SV: No, I cannot. Maybe they're all dead now anyway.

Grande was another one that was there in the strike camp. But I don't know about the others.

EG: [SV knew another person and his name was Isidoro Baring. But it doesn't seem like he knew him very well.]

About when the strike happened there at the camp that you were at, were there many friends of yours who joined in the strike?

SV: Well, when it came about there was some that I knew and some I didn't know very well. We all went out on strike together. There were many.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH SULPICIO VENYAN.

INTERVIEW WITH LAURANO JUABOT, A COMPANION OF SULPICIO VENYAN'S, WHO LIVES WITH HIM.

EG: Manong, how is it that you never got married?

LJ: Well, it was very difficult back in the old days, because there weren't so many Filipinas around, and there wasn't so much money

either; to be able to get married. And you wanted to be able to support your own family back in the Philippines, and to send them something. So I never did get around to getting married. One dollar one day.

EG: How old are you now, Manong?

LJ: I think maybe next year I'll be 78.

EG: When did you leave the Philippines?

LJ: I left the Philippines in 1922, was assigned in the Big Island until 1935, came to Honolulu, and after a short time in Honolulu, came to Kauai.

[Mrs. Allianic turns on the television in the background.]

LJ: While I was still there in the Philippines, we were engaged in the buy and sell business, and we went all over the Visayan Islands; and even as far away as Mindanao, to sell things like cloth.

EG: Were you also included in the strike of 1924?

LJ: Sure, that was the strike that affected all of Hawaii. And even though I was over on the Big Island, we were also included.

EG: Were you all Filipinos who were included in the strike there?

LJ: Yes, we were.

EG: Were there also other people besides Visayans?

LJ: Yes, there were some Ilocanos, and even Tagalogs. But only a few. It was Manlapit who was the leader of the strike at that time, and he went over to the Big Island also to speak to the workers. And his rival was Cayetano Ligot, a man sent from the Philippines, but who was bringing in Ilocanos to try and break the strike of the Visayans. When the strike was over, of course, we were not successful. And so some of the strikers went on to the Mainland and began working in California. Others returned to the Philippines. And I myself, I didn't go back to the plantation anymore, but went over to the other side of the island, to Kona, and began working in a coffee plantation.

EG: At the time of the strike, where were you?

LJ: Well, I was also inside of a strike camp there on the Big Island. There were many who joined the strike because the leaders were also saying that if you did not join the strike they would discipline you. I myself was afraid of being disciplined, and so I also joined.

EG: Where was the strike camp there on the Big Island?

LJ: It was in Honokaa. And there was also a camp in Kukuihaele.

EG: How many were you there in the strike camp?

LJ: Oh, we were plenty. There were single and married people. We were all living there together.

EG: Were you there in the strike camp a long time?

LJ: Yeah, we were there fairly long. Maybe it was around four months.

EG: Did Manlapit himself go over there?

LJ: Oh yeah, he was over there many times.

EG: Did you yourself hear him?

LJ: Yeah, I heard him many times. And there were also some other leaders there on the Big Island. Like one was called Milanio.

EG: [He names some other leaders also, but it's impossible to hear because Mrs. Allianic is talking, has the television set on, and he is talking. And so it's all mixed together.]

You yourself didn't go to jail?

LJ: No, I didn't.

EG: [He's talking about Manlapit. At the time of the strike something happened between Manlapit and his wife, and he didn't have a wife at the time of the strike. But he had a child. His wife was from here, she wasn't from the Philippines.]

When Manlapit spoke, during his talks, what language did he use?

LJ: He used Tagalog and English.

EG: Yeah, but if most of the people who were listening were Visayan, maybe they didn't understand it too well.

LJ: Yeah, but between the Tagalog and the English, and as much English and a little bit of Tagalog that they knew, they understand what he was talking about. And his talks were very simple; about raising the salary, and so they understood that quite well. A lot of what Manlapit talked about all the time was about uniting. Filipinos being united together as one family.

EG: What was your life like inside of the strike camps? How did you get by?

LJ: Well, it was the same as it was here. We were able to get by

because of the donations that people gave. It was the Japanese also there who were able to help out a lot. Especially the Japanese who had big businesses and things, they would give quite large donations.

EG: What did you do on an average day inside of the strike camp?

LJ: Nothing. We just kind of sat and we talked and told stories. And did our ordinary needs, like washing and cooking.

When the strike was all over, I was embarrassed to go back to the same plantation. And so that's how I came to go to Kona to work on coffee. So that's how come in 1935, I finally moved over to Honolulu, looking for some way of making money again. And I got working for a Japanese contractor in construction work. That's the way it was in Honolulu. Even though you might have a fairly good job, the cost of living there in Honolulu was also quite high. And so I began looking for other work. And that's how I came to come here to Kauai.

EG: [He is also a member of the Moncado group and has received a lot of help from them. Obviously that had a lot to do with making of decisions about where he went and what kind of work he would do.]

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 5-43-2-78 TR

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sulpicio Venyan (SV)

December 7, 1978

Makaweli, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Chad Taniguchi (CT)

EG: This is Mr. Sulpicio Venyan.

When you came here in 1922---is that correct?

SV: Yes, it is.

EG: When you came here, what was the first work that you did?

SV: Kalai in the sugar fields. At the Makaweli Plantation.

EG: That's the only kind of work that you did every day?

SV: Yes.

EG: How much was your salary?

SV: One dollar a day.

EG: How much money did you spend every month for food?

SV: Sometimes I spend \$10; as much as \$15 a month for food.

EG: And for your clothes, more or less, how much did you spend?

SV: Fifty pesos. [But he's been using pesos to mean dollars. So \$50.]

EG: To wash your clothes, how much?

SV: Well, around (\$2) a month.

EG: What did you do to amuse yourself? What were your hobbies before?

SV: I myself, I didn't have any kind of hobbies to amuse myself. I'm not fond of dancing or anything like that. Usually, I stay at home. Once in a great while, I go to see a movie.

EG: Did you have any expense for housing before?

SV: No. The housing was free on the plantation before. It's not the same as now. Now, there's a cost. It costs something to live in a house, even on a plantation.

EG: When did you first hear anything about the strike?

SV: There were people who came and told us that if you want a higher salary then you strike. And if you don't, then you don't. Because I wanted to save up a little bit of money I went out on strike.

EG: Who said that to you?

SV: It was Manlapit who said that the first time to me. Not to me personally, we were many. He said it there where we were meeting. We made an agreement among ourselves that since we wanted to have a higher salary that we would unite and go out on strike together.

EG: Did you have any leaders there among yourselves, though; not coming from the outside?

SV: Just Grande. And I don't know the others because I didn't know them personally. Grande's the only one that I knew. But there were many followers of Manlapit.

EG: In your own house, how many people were there, living there?

SV: I was all alone, but I was in one room. And then, in the next room, there were other people.

EG: So every person or family had a room for themselves?

SV: Yeah, that's right.

EG: Did you talk to other people like your neighbors or anybody, about the strike?

SV: No. It was just at the meeting itself that we decided it.

EG: Please don't get angry at me, but I'd like to ask you, how is it that you never got married?

SV: Well, I just don't care that much for women.

EG: How about now, if you had the opportunity, would you still get married?

SV: No, not me. I'm too old.

You know, before, when the strike was over, I was sending money back to the Philippines and also buying the things that I needed for myself. And there was just no opportunity really, to get married. And there were also not that many Filipinas--Filipino women--who were around.

EG: When you arrived here in Hawaii, how old were you?

SV: I was 19 years old.

EG: You didn't think about getting married before coming here to Hawaii?

SV: No, I didn't.

EG: When you were still in the Philippines did you ever hear the word "strike?"

SV: No, I never heard it before I came here. It was only here in Hawaii that I heard the word "strike."

EG: When you went to the strike camp, did you have any money that you had saved up?

SV: No, I did not. My money was already used up, and I didn't have any.

EG: From the time that you heard about the strike, until the time that you went to the strike camp, how much time went by?

SV: It didn't come to one day, the time between when I heard about the strike and we went to the strike camp. Right after we heard about it we went to the strike camp.

EG: Did you have any fears while you were inside of the strike camp, that you would die inside the strike camp or that there was no possibility of winning the strike?

SV: I myself, I wasn't afraid that I would die there. But there was some fear that the money would be used up and there wouldn't be anything to eat anymore. My purpose in going out on strike was not to fight with people.

EG: Did you have any idea, like for instance at the strike or in prison, that you would go back to the Philippines?

SV: Yeah. That's what I really was thinking about; especially if we won the strike, or in some way I was able to accumulate some money. I would have liked to have gone back. Of course, I never did go back, and now there's no possibility of that.

EG: Have you ever gone back?

SV: No, I have never gone back to the Philippines since I came here.

EG: What did they promise you about going into the strike camp, as far as food was concerned?

SV: Well, that was one of the things that Manlapit told us; that we

shouldn't worry about a place to stay or food to eat. That that would be taken care of, that people would contribute generously and take care of our needs. So people did. People gave rice and they gave fish, and they gave canned goods and things like that to support us. Sometimes they gave corned beef, sardines.

EG: Did anybody speak to you from the plantation; like the bosses or the owners warning you not to go out on strike?

SV: No. No one ever said anything to us. We just decided we'd go out on strike and we left, and no one spoke against it.

EG: Were you imprisoned, then, at the time of the strike?

SV: Yeah, all of us went into the prison camp. Maybe we were around 100; I wasn't the only one. The government asked that we be caught or rounded up, seized. And so we were rounded up and brought to jail.

EG: And what was your life like there inside?

SV: The government fed us.

EG: How many of you were inside of one room?

SV: Well, I was alone.

EG: You mean that everybody had one room for himself?

SV: No. Some rooms had three or four prisoners, some had only one.

EG: How about yourself, though; how many were you?

SV: We were three inside of the room.

EG: What did you talk about? Do you remember since you were there for quite a while?

SV: Yeah, we were there for about a month, and we almost didn't talk about anything else except the strike and what happened to us. My own feelings were well, we decided to join the strike and some of our companions got involved in a violent incident and killing one another, and so we all had to pay the price. We were all being punished for that. We wanted to strike and now we had to bear the punishment.

EG: What were you doing everyday?

SV: The government got us and we were cleaning the highways. A big truck would come and pick us up early in the morning, and then we would work alongside the road until the afternoon. And then they brought us back to the prison.

EG: After one month, what happened?

SV: After one month, they were asking questions and if you spoke the truth, then they released you. And if you didn't then you went to jail for a longer time.

EG: How would they know if you're telling the truth or not?

SV: I don't know. I don't know how they could tell. There was some kind of korokoro. [Not exactly a trial, I don't think; but like a questioning.] Each one individually was asked questions. One person one day.

I myself, I told them a lie. I wasn't speaking myself directly to the one who was asking the questions but through an interpreter. But they were my words that he was interpreting. And I said that it's true that I was out on strike. But I was not there the day when the shooting took place in Hanapepe. I was telling them that I was going around the town, that I wasn't really there when the shooting took place. But of course, I was there. They asked me if anybody saw me when I was going around town and I said, "Yeah, I was with a friend of mine, Fortunato Ramagera." They asked me how long I was there with him or at his house, and I told them I was there for three days. Of course, I was there all the time, when the shooting took place. I was in the banana patch.

They said, "You mean you weren't there when the shooting took place?"

And I said, "No, I wasn't. So I didn't do anything wrong, because after all, I wasn't there." So I was released.

EG: How many were you who were released at that time?

SV: I don't really know, because I don't know how their investigations turned out. I just know that I was released at that time.

EG: So when you came out you were all alone?

SV: Yeah, that's right. I was alone.

EG: Who was the person questioning you?

SV: A judge.

EG: Do you remember his name?

SV: No, I don't. Haole man.

EG: Was there any of your companions who still thought that even while you were in jail the strike was still worthwhile? Did you hear anybody say that?

SV: No, I didn't.

EG: So you all felt quite sorry about the way things turned out?

SV: Yes, we did. The reason why I went out on strike in the first place was that I would like to have increased a little bit of money that I had. That's why I joined. There was nothing we could do because it ended up in violence.

EG: So when you came out of the prison camp, you just moved over here to the Robinson Plantation?

SV: Yes, that's right.

EG: Manong, do you happen to know if any of your fellow prisoners who were in jail with you at that time are still alive today?

SV: I don't know. I never saw them again. I had no contact with them.

EG: Did you have any close friends inside of the jail?

SV: No, I didn't.

EG: What were you doing everyday inside of the strike camp? What kind of work did you do?

SV: We actually didn't have any formal kind of work. We just went around a little bit. Took care of our personal needs, that was it. Many times we'd go walking down by the beach.

EG: Did you yourself go fishing?

SV: No.

EG: Did you go swimming or take a bath in the ocean?

SV: Not me, I'm afraid of the ocean. The sea was quite rough in that place. It would be all right if I knew how to swim, but I don't. You could drown very easily in the ocean. There are big fish there, including sharks.

EG: Manong, who was the man who did the interpreting there, while you were in jail that interpreted from Visayan to English?

SV: Ah, he's already dead.

EG: But who was he?

SV: I don't really know who he was. He was not one of ours.

EG: Was he a Visayan?

SV: No, I don't think he was a Visayan because he spoke it but

he didn't speak it like a Visayan does. It was an Ilongo maybe.

EG: So he was a Filipino, at least?

SV: Yeah.

EG: Was he in jail also?

SV: No.

EG: Do you think he understood what he was saying or that he interpreted correctly?

SV: Yes, I think so. He understood everything I said.

EG: This judge who was questioning you, how long of a duration was he questioning you? Was it for days or hours?

SV: I don't know how many hours it was, but it wasn't very long. It was over very quickly. Maybe it wasn't even one hour.

EG: What other questions did he ask you?

SV: There were no others. That's all that he really asked me. He wanted to know where I was at the time. Not only was I one of the strikers but where was I at the time when the violence broke out. That was the only question he was really interested in.

EG: He didn't ask you anything about if you had weapons?

SV: No.

EG: The judge who asked you these questions, do you remember what he looked like? Was he tall or short? Was he haole or Filipino?

SV: No, he wasn't Filipino. I'm not sure whether he was a Hawaiian or haole.

EG: Was he old or young?

SV: He was old.

EG: Was he fat?

SV: Yeah, he was sort of fat. But I really don't know what his name was.

EG: Was there ever anybody who explained to you why you were there in jail?

SV: I never had any visitors while I was there in jail.

EG: But how about maybe a lawyer or a policeman, or a judge, who came and told you why you were there?

SV: I never heard anyone say any of those things to me, while I was there.

EG: So did you yourself know why you were there in prison?

SV: Sure, I knew. We were there simply because we decided to join the strike, and some of our companions got out of hand and they began to fight, and there was violence and people died. And so we were all inside of the jail because we were included in that. Because if the fight and the violence had not broken out we wouldn't be there in jail.

EG: So therefore, you were in jail not because of your own fault, but because of the fault of your companions?

SV: We were all together in this whole thing, beginning from when the strike first came about. We were all carried on the big truck, we all agreed that we would stop working, that we would try and get a higher salary. And so, whatever happened is the responsibility of all of us.

EG: Did anybody ever tell you that what you did was wrong, or anything like that?

SV: No. No one ever said those kinds of things to us. You were in jail and they kept you there until the time came for your turn to be questioned. And then they questioned you, and if they agreed with you they let you go. And if not, then you stayed in jail.

EG: That's the last time that you were ever on strike? You never went out on strike again?

SV: No. Never did again.

EG: When you were working on the highways, were you all strikers working together in a group on the highways?

SV: No. I don't know what the crime of the other people who were working with us was, but there were other people. Some were strikers, and some were not.

EG: So were all of you there, working on the road? You were 100 strikers working on the road?

SV: No, there was no longer 100 of us there because 50 had been taken away already.

EG: Where were they taken away?

SV: Well, they were sent back to the Philippines.

EG: So you were around 50, working on the highway?

SV: Yeah, more or less, that's how many we were.

EG: Did you have any visitors, like on Sunday, there at the prison?

SV: No, no one ever came to see me.

EG: So no one ever came to see you?

SV: Well, there was Salvation.

EG: Who was she?

SV: No, no. I mean that kind of stuff like religion [possibly the Salvation Army]. People would come on Sundays and they would put on some kind of a religious service for us. That's the kind of visitors that we had.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

SV: ...come to see us. And when they finished, then they would go home, after the religious services were over. That was every Sunday that they would come.

EG: While we're doing these interviews, if you can only be patient with us because we're not even sure of the right questions. But you're the only person that we've met so far who has been a striker, who was involved in the violence that took place at Hanapepe, and was put in jail. So the reason why we're doing this and asking you these questions is for the future, so that it can be recorded and other people would know what it was like for the first Filipinos who came here to Hawaii.

SV: Our real hope, when we first arrived at the strike camp, was that we might be able to win this strike if we stay united together, and if nothing happens. But as it turns out, the violence happened. And we all had to pay the price for that. Nothing came of it.

We figured we were going to be there a long time in the strike camp, and we had to be sure that there'd be enough food for us. Because if the food ran out then we'd have to break apart the strike. If there is no food and no one to support the strike, there's no way of continuing it.

EG: That \$1 a day that you were receiving before, was that good enough for the needs that you had?

SV: Sure. Why wouldn't it be enough if you were all alone. One dollar a day would be enough.

EG: So why did you go out on strike, then, if the money was enough for you?

SV: Well, I was really thinking of my family back in the Philippines. I would like to have sent them something also. Especially to my mother and my cousins, and the rest of the family.

EG: Did you send money back to the Philippines when you got here?

SV: Yeah, I did. In the past. Not when I first came. Because that was too difficult. But maybe after about eight years I was able to send money. Of course, now I don't send any money anymore, because they're all dead.

Is it all right if I ask you a question also?

EG: Oh yes, please feel free to ask us.

SV: You know, why is it that you keep asking me these questions and are taking my picture? Are you planning to send me back to jail?

EG: [I went into a long explanation about what the Oral History Project is all about, and I apologized to him for not having explained very well yesterday, when we did our first interview with him. And the farthest thing from our mind would be that he would go to jail or anything like that; that actually this is for the young people and for people in the future, about the lives of Filipinos who first arrived here in Hawaii and what their sacrifices were, and the people who reap the benefits of that today. And so he seems to accept that.]

About the two Ilocanos who were caught on the road and kept in the downstairs of the school, who made the decision to hold on to them and what to do with them? Who was responsible for that decision?

SV: These two Ilocanos were on their way to the store. The guard who was standing by the gate saw them coming back from the store. And he said to him, "Hey, could you give me some tobacco?" When he came over to give the tobacco to the guard--put out his hand with the tobacco in it--the guard grabbed a hold of his arm and pulled him in. The strikers were angry at those two Ilocanos and they slapped them around a bit. The response of the two Ilocanos was that they agreed to go out on strike also. They were kept in the downstairs of the hall and we guarded them.

The next morning, the sheriff of the town came there, and he said, "Where are those people that you've caught? I want to see them." So they brought them out. The sheriff went close to them, and then he got a hold of them and he pulled them, and they started to run. And they ran out, and the strikers followed them, and that's how the whole thing began.

EG: You yourself, when this was happening where were you?

SV: I was outside. I was in the banana patch. And I was hiding because I was thinking, I ain't going to get myself killed there.

EG: How did you know to go into the banana patch? How could you foresee that it was going to be dangerous?

SV: I could already hear the shooting starting, and so I knew it was going to be dangerous. As soon as the shooting started, I ran.

EG: Did you yourself see the Ilocanos who were in the downstairs of the school there?

SV: Sure. You couldn't help but see them if you were going by. And I went by there a few times.

EG: Did you yourself punch them a few times?

SV: No, I wouldn't do something like that. No, not at all. Why should I punch them when they haven't done anything to me? You yourself will be destroyed because you're hitting a person who is just like you are.

EG: Do you know who their guards were?

SV: No, I don't.

EG: Who was responsible for, or who made the decisions about what would happen to the Ilocanos?

SV: The one who was in charge of our group; the one that they called "Grande." But he also had a lot of other people who were with him. I really don't know the others who were with Grande.

I also have heard the name of Evaristo. People said that he had a special ability, that he couldn't be harmed by bullets. But I didn't really know him myself.

EG: Manong, do you think that among the strikers there were pistols that they had?

SV: I don't know. I never heard anybody talking about it. And I myself never saw anybody with pistols.

EG: This is a list of the men who were killed at the incident in Hanapepe. [I read the list of all the men. He doesn't know any of them. There's one last name, Ramos, and also one Zacarias; he hesitates and thinks. It looks like they're familiar to him but he just can't remember.]

These are the people who died during the strike, but it seems like you don't know any of them.

SV: No, I don't. The only person I know is Grande. He was referred to very often.

EG: Did you actually see him yourself?

SV: Yes, I did.

EG: Is that really his name, or is that a nickname, "Grande?" It could be because he had such a big body that they called him Grande.

SV: I don't really know. That's just what they called him. I don't know if that was his real name or they just gave it to him.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 5-53-3-79 TR1

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Sulpicio Venyan (SV) and Laurano Juabot (LJ)

May 22, 1979

Makaweli, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Chad Taniguchi (CT)

CT: This is an interview with Mr. Venyan. Today is May 22, 1979, and this is in Mr. Venyan's house in Makaweli.

EG: [There was a bill before the legislature that everybody seemed to be in favor of, with very few exceptions, about sending elderly Filipinos back to the Philippines. The sponsor of this bill is a Jesuit priest who works in Honolulu and runs a project called Balik Bahay. Balik, to return; bahay, to the home. EG is asking Mr. Venyan what he thought about that. SV is saying something like:]

SV: Well, if people have something to go back to, then it might be very good. But if they don't have anything to go back to, it might be very difficult for them.

EG: I only have three questions to ask you. Is it not true that you were one of the strikers there in Hanapepe?

SV: Yes, I was.

EG: When you were walking around the town, did people know, automatically, that you were strikers?

SV: You mean did the other strikers know their fellow strikers?

EG: No, no. Just other people, in general, in the town of Hanapepe. Would they have known?

SV: I think maybe they did know that we were strikers.

EG: How would they know that?

SV: They could tell by looking at us.

EG: What would be the difference between yourselves and the other people in the town?

- SV: Well, they knew by looking at us because we were there in the strike camp.
- EG: Yeah, but how about when you were walking around the town? Was it because you were a Filipino?
- SV: Yeah. We were all Filipinos in the strike camp. Maybe that was one way that they knew. There was no Japanese, no Portuguese, no other. No Hawaiians. We were all Filipinos. Filipinos and Filipinas.
- EG: The story that you told us about the two Ilocanos who were caught.... Where were you, yourself, when those two Ilocanos were caught?
- SV: I was there on the road.
- EG: So you saw, with your own two eyes, the catching of the two Ilocanos?
- SV: Yes, I did. They were caught and dragged inside of the strike camp into the hall.
- EG: Were you included in the group that caught the two?
- SV: No, I was not. I was far away from them.
- EG: But you saw it?
- SV: Yes, I saw it.
- EG: Manong, when you said that you were inside of the jail after the whole thing was all over with, you worked on the roads every day.
- SV: That's right. We worked on the highways.
- EG: What was your work there alongside the roads?
- SV: Well, we were kalai kalai, we were cutting grass. And we were cutting wood.
- EG: And what were you cutting with? Did you have a bolo?
- SV: Yes, that's what we had. A bolo. And a cut-cane knife.
- EG: Weren't they afraid that you might escape, especially since you had weapons?
- SV: No, they weren't afraid of that. There was nobody escaping.
- EG: Were there guards there?
- SV: Yes, there were. Just one person. There was also a luna.
- EG: More or less, how many were you, working on the road there?

SV: I don't know. I never counted.

EG: Was there a hundred?

SV: No.

EG: Fifty?

SV: No. Maybe 30 or 25.

EG: The police who were guarding you, did they have pistols?

SV: At the jail, they did, but while we working on the road, they didn't. They were just watching us work.

EG: So they weren't afraid that you'd escape?

SV: No, they had no reason to be afraid.

EG: Were they Filipinos who were guarding you?

SV: There were two who were Filipinos. But for the ones who were guarding us while we were working, they were not Filipinos. The ones who were guarding us were Hawaiians.

EG: That work of yours, was it heavy kind of work?

SV: No, it was not. Just easy work. It was just very easy.

EG: Was the work harder there than the kind of work you did on the plantation?

SV: No, the work in the jail was much easier than what we had to do on the plantation. On the plantation, it was very difficult work.

EG: Did you eat while you were working on the road right there?

SV: Yeah, we brought along a lunch.

EG: For example, what would you be eating for lunch?

SV: We had cooked rice.

EG: Did you have something along with the rice?

SV: Yeah. We brought along a viand, something to accompany the rice. Once a week only, though, we had meat. And for other days, we had like fish, or vegetables. Sometimes, we had potato.

EG: Did Filipinos have any other kind of work besides working on the plantation? For example, were they working in the stores?

SV: I don't know. I really didn't go around very much in Hanapepe to know whether there were Filipinos working in the stores. All the Filipinos that I knew were involved in some type of farm work--exclusively with sugar.

EG: How much did you spend for food for one month at that time?

SV: Eighty pesos.

EG: How could that be? How much was your salary at that time?

SV: I forget. [SV asks LJ.]

LJ: A dollar a day.

EG: How about washing your clothes? How much did you spend for washing your clothes?

SV: Two dollars every month.

EG: Where did they catch you when you went to jail?

SV: Right there on the road itself, there at Hanapepe. Myself and my companion. There were three big trucks that came. There were police, and they said, "Get inside," or, "Get up here and ride."
"All of you are going to jail."

EG: And how did you get out of jail?

SV: Oh, I told a lie. I told them I wasn't there. When the fight took place, I told them I wasn't there. But really, I was there.

EG: How can that be? When they picked you up, you were there. How was it that they believed your lie?

SV: The only reason is because the people who picked me up and the people who asked me the question weren't the same people. They didn't know each other. Not that they didn't know each other, but they didn't talk to each other. It was at the court that they asked that question. None of the police were there to testify where they had caught us. If I had been hit by the bullet, then I wouldn't even be here to be talking to you now.

EG: If they had sent you back to the Philippines, you wouldn't be included in our book.

(Laughter)

EG: [EG directs this question to LJ.] Why is it when the strike finished there on the Big Island also [where LJ was during the strike], you moved to Kona? Why is it you didn't go to the Mainland, or go back to the Philippines, or even to Honolulu? Why did you pick Kona?

LJ: It's the only place that I know of that had work available.

EG: According to what you were saying before, if people didn't join together in the strike, then something would happen to them. They would be punished.

LJ: That's true.

EG: What kind of punishment would they do?

LJ: I don't know, because everybody joined the strike. They would do some discipline on you. People were afraid not to join the strike, and so I also joined the strike.

EG: Nobody was disciplined, so we don't really know what that is.

LJ: That's right.

EG: How is it that you didn't go back to the plantation that you had been working on, once the strike was all over? Were you afraid that people would criticize you, or the ones who didn't strike would make fun, something like that?

LJ: No, I had no fear that I would be criticized, but I just made up my mind during the strike that I wouldn't go back to the same place. Secondly, the work on the coffee plantations was lighter kind of work and it paid more. When I heard the news about what had happened in Hanapepe, I made up my mind not to do sugar work anymore.

EG: Manong, when you went there to Kona, what kind of work did you do?

LJ: Picking coffee.

EG: How would the compare the two? Where was the better place to work, in the sugar plantations or in the coffee?

LJ: You get a little more money from picking coffee. If you picked two bags of coffee, you make \$2.

EG: In one day, how much coffee could you pick? I mean, usually.

LJ: Sometime, 2-1/2 bags. Sometimes, I could do three bags, so that would be \$3.

EG: Comparing the two, where is the heavier work?

LJ: It's easier to pick coffee. I was fairly long in picking coffee. I was longer in picking coffee than I had actually had been in working in the sugar. But around 1935, I moved into Honolulu.

EG: Who owned the coffee plantation?

LJ: A Japanese.

EG: Was the coffee plantation big?

LJ: It was 18 acres.

EG: So what did they do with their coffee?

LJ: They sold it to a company.

EG: What company?

LJ: I forgot.

EG: Where did you live when you were working there in the coffee plantation?

LJ: I lived in one of the houses of the owner.

EG: What kind of a house was it?

LJ: Well, it's the old-style housing on plantations.

EG: How many of you were living in one unit?

LJ: Oh, sometimes we were five. The house was free, it didn't cost anything. The only expenses you had were for food. The water was free, but there was no electricity.

EG: So was that work all year long, or just for a certain period of time?

LJ: It was all year long, but there were different things to do. Like sometimes, you would be picking, but other times you would be cleaning, or planting. Weeding.

EG: How many times in the year do you pick coffee?

LJ: You only pick once, but the period for picking is about three months long. During the rest of the year, cutting and trimming, and things like that would keep us busy.

EG: How many people were working on that 18 acres of coffee?

LJ: I don't know.

EG: How about exactly where you're working, how many people are involved?

LJ: During harvest time, they would have extra people there, but during other times, when we were cleaning and weeding, then there was just that basic skeleton crew.

- EG: How did the owners, the Japanese, treat you?
- LJ: They treated us well. They didn't cheat us. They were good to us.
- EG: What was the salary outside of the harvest time? [During harvest time, they were getting a dollar a sack.]
- LJ: On other times, when we weren't harvesting, they gave a dollar and a quarter [\$1.25] for the regulars who were working every day. So, in other words, you were looking forward to the harvest time, because during the harvest time, you could make a little more money--because you were on piecework--than the regular season. So it depended on the kind of work that you were doing--that's the salary that you would receive. But that dollar and a quarter [\$1.25] a day, that wasn't the same, because in other places, the salary was different. Even some places gave as much as a dollar and a half [\$1.50] a day.
- EG: Who were the people who generally owned the coffee plantations?
- LJ: Mostly they were Japanese. It's a fairly new thing for Filipinos to be leasing the lands and raising coffee. They don't actually own the land; they're just leasing it.
- EG: Did they lease it from the Japanese?
- LJ: No, mostly they leasing it from the bank. For the few Filipinos who had land, some of them wanted to go back to the Philippine, and so they sold the lands to the companies.
- EG: How did you communicate with the Japanese since you speak Visayan, and they speak Japanese?
- LJ: Ah, we're able to communicate through broken English. That's the way we were able to communicate. It's kind of like Hawaiian and English and our own language all rolled up, and we spoke to one another.
- EG: What was the life of the Japanese like?
- LJ: It was fairly good. One of the reasons for that being that there were other Japanese businessmen who trusted them and lent them money. When it came time to harvest the coffee, the businesses made enough money on the coffee to be able to pay all their debts and then make money. The Japanese who were there in Kona did quite well. They were prosperous. They were somewhat rich. Japanese had some kind of an organization, and they were always helping one another out.

Because the coffee plantations were quite small, there was no luna system as there was in sugar, but the owner was, all at the same time, the luna. He told people what to do, and that's what they did.

EG: Suppose you needed medicine or to see a doctor. How did that work?

LJ: Well, that was up to you. You had to go. There were doctors and there was also medicine that could be bought. But the owner of the coffee plantations, they had nothing at all to do with that. That was up to you.

EG: Suppose you got sick, and you didn't know what was wrong with you. How did you get to the doctor?

LJ: Oh, that was up to you. You had to take the responsibility for getting to a doctor.

CT: What was your reaction when you heard about the strike?

LJ: I had no other feeling except that I was very sad because of the strike. Because of what happened to the strikers. It was too bad because it didn't seem to be a successful strike at that time.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

LJ: I felt nothing as much as sadness over what happened to the strikers and the lack of success of the strike. And also, not only the ones who died, but those who went to prison. In my own case, it turned out fairly well because I got out of sugar and went into coffee, and in a way, it was an improvement for me, personally. But I felt bad about the loss of life. And now, since the time that I've retired, I receive every month some Social Security or pension. I'm happy that I receive this pension every month, and I'm also very happy that my health is still quite good.

EG: Both of you have a pension, I suppose?

LJ: Yes, we do.

EG: Maybe the pension is a little bit lacking?

LJ: No, it's good enough, because that's what they give us.

EG: Maybe when the two of you were living here together, you have time to talk, and maybe a lot of times, you recollect the past, and what happened. Your experiences are different. One of you was on the Big Island; the other one went to jail. Do you sometimes talk about the strike and what it was like?

LJ: No, we don't talk about the strike. That was a long time ago. It was a long time since the strike, so we don't talk about it. Most of our stories are about other things.

EG: [EG directs this question to SV.] Oh, how about you, manong? Maybe sometimes you feel a little bit sad about why you got into the whole strike thing. Do you regret having participated?

SV: No, I don't. Que sera, sera.

EG: We're grateful for your sharing something of your experience because most people who know what it was like in those days are dying out. There's an old saying in Filipino: "They who forget where they came from will never reach the place that they're going to." [It refers to young people and their roots, especially young Filipinos, and what these men went through in the past.]

SV: Thank you for listening to my story.

END OF INTERVIEW

The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

June 1979